



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## THE FLEXIBILITY OF REQUIREMENTS FOR ADMISSION TO COLLEGES EAST AND WEST

---

LEONARD V. KOOS  
University of Minnesota

---

### I. THE SOURCE OF THE DATA USED IN THE STUDY

The data used in this comparison of requirements for admission to higher institutions in our seven northeasternmost states with those in eleven western and Pacific coast states were drawn from two chief sources, (1) the printed statements of admission requirements, and (2) responses to a questionnaire. Copies of the questionnaire were directed to the registering officers, who were requested to supply the printed statement at the time the blank of inquiry was being returned.

The lists of institutions used in sending out the questionnaire were those appearing in the Educational Directory (1916-17) of the United States Bureau of Education, published as *Bulletin No. 43, 1916*, and issued early in 1917. The lists of colleges and universities in this directory totaled seventy-three for the New England states and New York and fifty-one for the eleven western and Pacific Coast states of Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Washington, Oregon, and California. Thus the schools whose admission requirements are represented in the tabulations were not selected, except as to locality, and except in so far as there is selection in making up the lists appearing in the directory. The extent of selection for the latter purpose may be inferred from a quotation from a letter directed to the writer by a member of the bureau staff:

An institution to be included . . . must be authorized to give degrees; must have definite standards of admission; must give at least two years' work of standard college grade; and must have at least twenty students in regular college status.

Almost all institutions appealed to in both sections of the country made response of some sort, i.e., sixty-six of the eastern group and forty-nine of the western. But some of them responded

by returning the questionnaire only, others by sending the printed statement only, while a few sent merely a letter of explanation of the admission requirements. For the sake of accuracy, no institution was included in the final list used in the tabulation from which both questionnaire and printed statement were not received. These two sources were used as checks upon each other. A high degree of accuracy is further assured by the fact that many of those who submitted both printed statements and questionnaires volunteered additional explanation by letter. The findings here presented are, therefore, not as susceptible of qualification through error as are most investigations by questionnaire.

The institutions whose entrance requirements have been included in the study are:

#### EAST—40 INSTITUTIONS

*Connecticut.*—Trinity College, Wesleyan University.

*Massachusetts.*—College of the Holy Cross, Clark College, Massachusetts Agricultural College, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Mount Holyoke College, Radcliffe College, Simmons College, Smith College, Tufts College, Wellesley College, Wheaton College, Williams College, Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

*New Hampshire.*—Dartmouth College.

*New York.*—Alfred College, Barnard College, Clarkson College of Technology, Colgate University, College of the City of New York, Columbia College, Cornell University, Elmira College, Hamilton College, Hunter College, Manhattan College, Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn, St. John's College, St. Stephen's College, Teachers College (Columbia), Union College, United States Military Academy, Vassar College, Wells College.

*Rhode Island.*—Brown University, Rhode Island State College.

*Vermont.*—Middlebury College, Norwich University, University of Vermont.

#### WEST—37 INSTITUTIONS

*Arizona.*—University of Arizona.

*California.*—College of the Pacific, Leland Stanford Junior University, Mills College, Occidental College, Pomona College, Throop Polytechnic Institute, University of California, University of Redlands, University of Southern California, Whittier College.

*Colorado.*—Colorado Agricultural College, Colorado College, State Teachers College, University of Colorado, University of Denver.

*Idaho.*—College of Idaho, University of Idaho.

*Montana.*—Montana State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, Montana State School of Mines, University of Montana.

*Nevada.*—University of Nevada.

*New Mexico.*—University of New Mexico.

*Oregon.*—Albany College, McMinnville College, Oregon Agricultural College, Pacific University, Reed College, University of Oregon, Willamette University.

*Utah.*—University of Utah, Utah Agricultural College.

*Washington.*—College of Puget Sound, State College of Washington, University of Washington, Whitman College.

*Wyoming.*—University of Wyoming.

It is worth while to note that only the matter of a half-dozen of the eastern group of institutions are state institutions, while approximately half of the western group bear such a relationship. This fact alone will lead many readers to anticipate a greater flexibility of requirements in the western than in the eastern institutions.

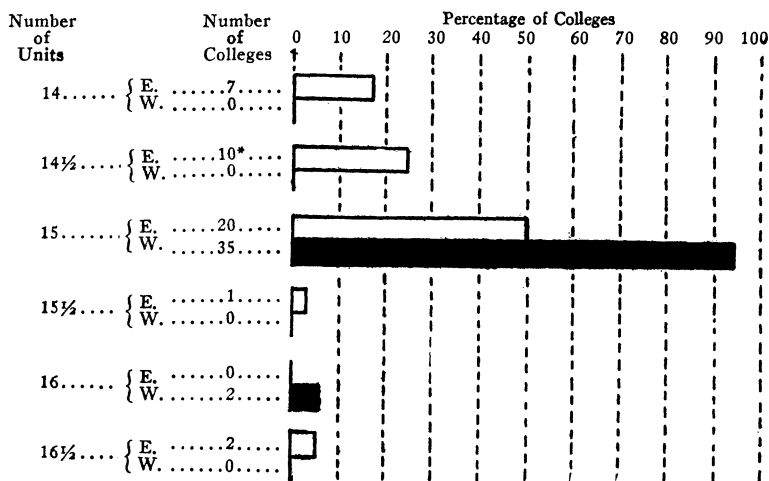


FIG. 1.—Total number of units required for admission

\* One of these requires 14.4 units.

As the investigation was begun in the fall of 1917, the statements of requirements are those in operation at the beginning of the academic year 1917-18. No doubt some changes have been made in entrance requirements since that date. As such changes must have taken place in both groups, the contrasts are doubtless essentially as here presented.

Many institutions have differing requirements for different courses or schools. This obtains in both the eastern and the western groups. In each such instance the requirements for the B.A. degree or the arts course or college were used in the tabulations.

## II. THE FINDINGS IN DETAIL

*The total number of units<sup>1</sup> required for admission.*—Figure 1 sets forth the situation as to the total numbers of units required for admission to the two groups of higher institutions. The most common practice in the East is to require fifteen units, but large proportions ask for but fourteen or fourteen and one-half units. A very few ask for more than fifteen. No school in the West requires less than fifteen, while a few require as many as sixteen.

*Number of units required in English.*—The higher institutions in both East and West predominantly require candidates for

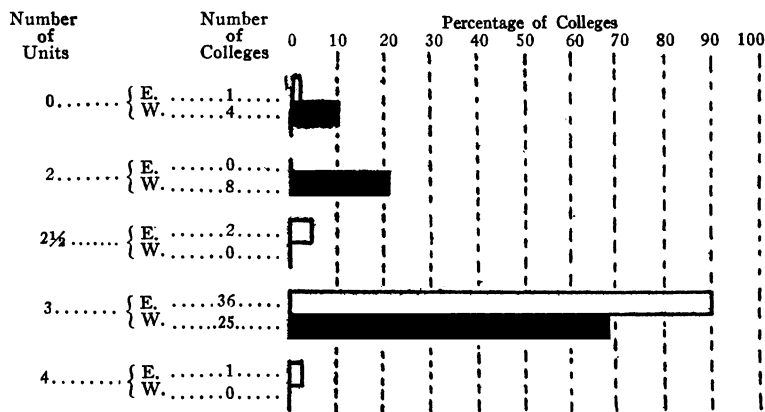


FIG. 2.—Number of units of English required for admission

admission to offer three units in English (Fig. 2). There is some tendency in the West to require less than this. A fifth of the western group, most of them in California, insist upon a minimum requirement of only two units. An approximate tenth, those which refrain from making any prescription whatever, specify no units in this field. One may safely venture the opinion that seldom, if ever, does a candidate for entrance to these institutions appear who does not offer work in English.

*Number of units required in mathematics.*—According to Figure 3 the predominant requirements in supra-arithmetical mathematics in the East are two and one-half and three units. A fifth of the

<sup>1</sup> The unit used throughout this study is "a subject carried each of five days of the school week during the entire school year, or its equivalent. Where statements of requirements made use of other units, they were reduced to this basis.

institutions limit the requirement to two units and two specify no mathematics. In the West, the requirements do not often exceed two units and in a fifth of the cases no prescription of mathematics is made.

*The requirement in foreign language.*—Figure 4 presents the facts as to the number of units of foreign language required for admission. For the purposes of this figure, wherever the requirement is stated in some such form as "Latin, 4 units, or Greek, 3 units," the lower amount was used in the computations. Alternatives somewhat similar to this example were given in nine instances

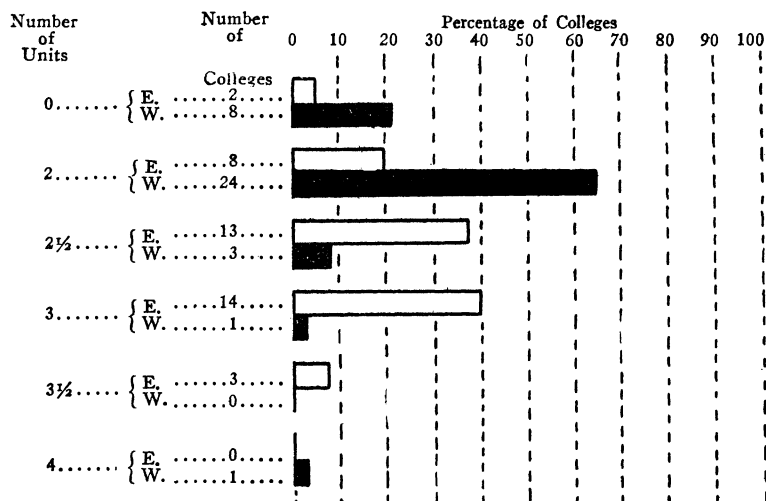


FIG. 3.—Number of units of mathematics required for admission

in the eastern group and once in the western group. It must be admitted that introducing the minimum alternative, as was done here, is not always justifiable, since the language in which the minimum is accepted, usually Greek, is not offered in all high schools sending students to the higher institutions concerned. In actual operation the requirement tends, therefore, to be somewhat higher than tabulated, especially in the East.

The practice in eastern institutions ranges from no requirement to one of nine units, with considerable proportions of the group at no, two, three, four, five, and six units. The more common practices are requirements of five and six units. In western institutions

the most common practice is to make no requirement in this field. Next in order of frequency is a requirement of two units. Few institutions in the West ask for more than this amount.

The contrast, however, is not solely in the *amount* required. It appears also in the prescription of *specific* languages and in the *variety of statement* of the requirements. Although the facts are not presented here in tabular form, it may be said that the eastern colleges not infrequently prescribe specific amounts of specific languages, a practice almost never followed in western higher

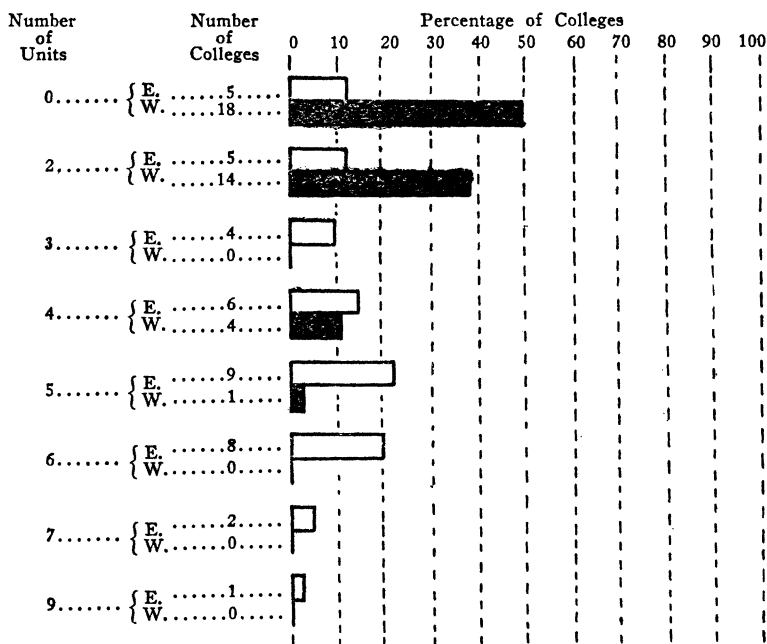


FIG. 4.—Number of units of foreign language required for admission

institutions. For instance, Latin is specified in fifteen instances in the former and but twice in the latter.

The situation as to the variety of statement of the requirements in foreign language may be summarized by saying that for the 35 institutions in the eastern group making a requirement there are 30 different statements. For the 19 institutions in the western group making a requirement there are but 8 different statements.

The task of advising students in the high school who plan entrance to college must, therefore, be much more bewildering in the East than in the West.

*The requirements in science and history.*—No figures are presented setting forth the requirements in these two fields. The situation for the former may be summarized by the statement that eastern institutions less frequently make such a requirement and tend to

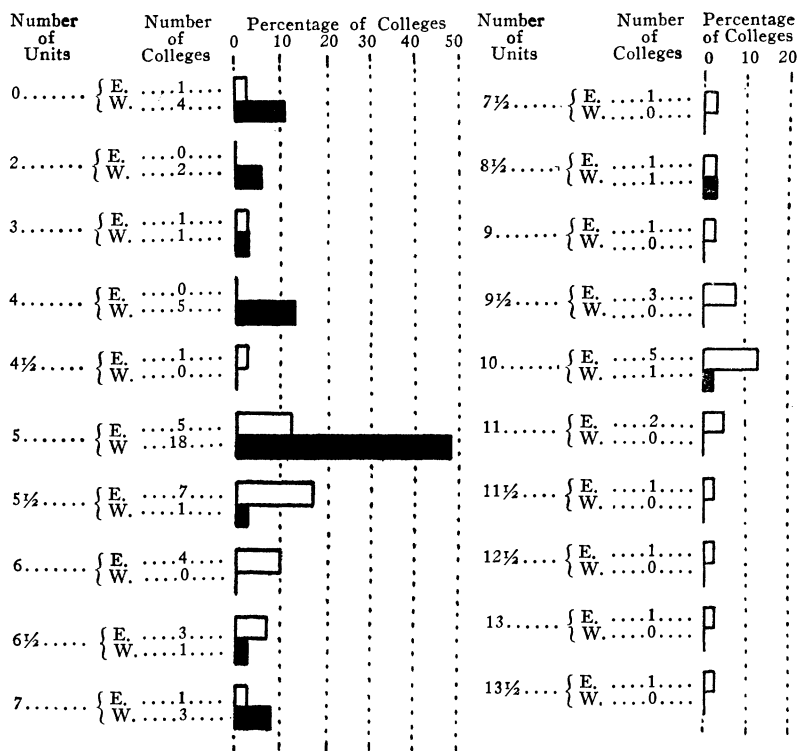


FIG. 5.—Total number of units of specific requirements for admission

require less than do western institutions, although in neither group is a requirement of more than a single unit common. In but a few instances in either group is prescription of specific sciences made and then it is physics or physics and chemistry. Several western institutions insist on a "third- or fourth-year laboratory science" without further specification.



The more common practice is to require a single unit in history, the next larger proportion reporting no prescription. Very few in either group require more than one unit. In the small proportion of cases where requirement of a specific course in history is made, it is usually ancient history in eastern and American in western schools.

*The total number of units of specific prescription.*—An important factor of inflexibility in college entrance requirements is the total amount of prescription of specific subjects of study. The facts on the requirements in each field so far considered lead to the conclusion that there is wide variation in the practices in this regard. Figure 5 bears out this conclusion. For the purposes of this tabulation the following have been regarded as specific prescriptions: all units of English; all units in supra-arithmetical mathematics; all units of foreign language where a specific language is named and no alternative or option is given; all units of specific sciences, specific courses in history, or other subjects, e.g., "one unit of physics," "a unit in ancient history."

The eastern schools tend to specify larger proportions of the total requirement than do those in the western group. The proportion varies widely in both groups, but no western institution specifies more than ten units. Totaling the percentages shown in the figure indicates that four-fifths of the eastern schools prescribe specifically more than five units, while a similar proportion of the western schools prescribe five units or less. As the amount of specific prescription must be regarded as a primary factor of inflexibility in requirements, those in the West are seen to be much more flexible than those in the East.

*Special arrangements making for flexibility.*—Some reference should be made at this point to certain adjustments of admission requirements which conduce to flexibility and which are in use in a small proportion of schools in both East and West. Although the representatives of the type are far from identical, it may be illustrated by quotation from the statement of practice followed in a western institution. After specifying requirements in English (three units) and mathematics (two units), a portion of the statement proceeds as shown at the top of the following page. In some instances the latitude of option is more restricted than in this illustration. In others it is more liberal. The western exam-

II. *Elective in Groups*: Three in one and two in another; or two in each of three of the following groups:

1. Foreign Language: . . . Latin, Greek, German, French, Spanish.
2. Natural Sciences: Botany, Chemistry, Geology, Physical Geography, Physics, Physiology, Zoölogy.
3. Social Sciences: Economics, History.
4. Mathematics . . .

ples of this type tend to be more flexible than the eastern. It may be seen to possess the advantage of avoiding specific prescription on the one hand without absence of continuity of training in *some* academic subjects on the other.

*Credit for a single unit of foreign language.*—Eastern schools are equally divided as to accepting or refusing credit for a single year of foreign language. Only eight institutions, or 21.6 per cent, of the western group deny the credit. Additional facts deserving mention are that the eastern schools which allow credit more frequently restrict the range of foreign languages from which the single unit is accepted, that the western schools more often prescribe that the unit be “in addition to the requirement of foreign language” or that the credit is granted on condition that the student continue the language in college. The contrast in this respect is another illustration of the greater flexibility of requirements in western colleges.

*Recognition of newer subjects.*—The numbers and percentages of higher institutions granting entrance credit for certain newer subjects appearing in high-school programs of study are shown in Figure 6. In addition to the subjects named, the statements occasionally make mention of other subjects accepted for credit. Italian is sometimes named, more frequently in eastern than in western colleges. A few western institutions name Bible history and physical education. In the number and percentage for each subject presented in the figure have been included those schools in whose statements were found some such expression as the following: “all subjects recognized for graduation from an accredited high school,” “. . . any subjects . . . which an approved secondary school counts toward graduation. . . .” There were two such institutions in the eastern and five in the western group.

A fact not presented in the figure but deserving mention is that one-fourth of the eastern colleges accept no credit in any of the subjects named. There was no institution with such a restriction in the western group.

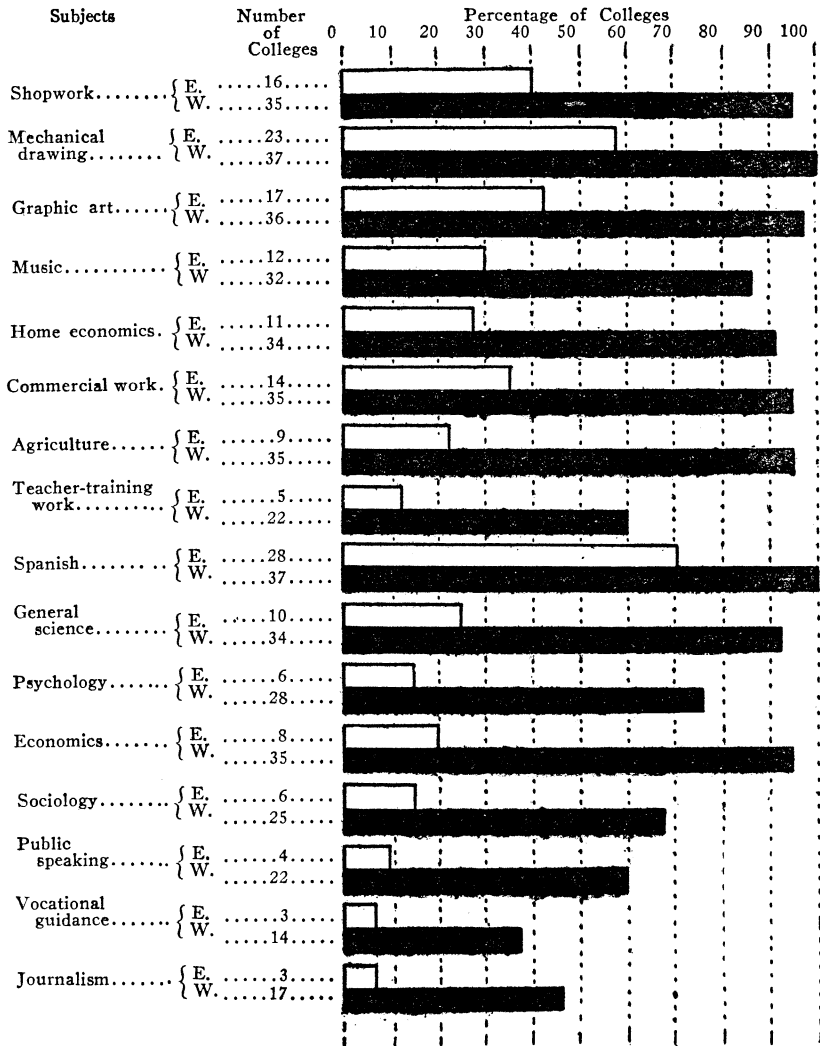


FIG. 6.—Numbers and percentages of the colleges granting credit for certain newer high-school subjects.

The marked contrast between eastern and western practices in Figure 6 would be emphasized if facts concerning the *amounts* of credit accepted in vocational subjects by the institutions in the two sections were presented. It was impossible to determine from many

printed statements of requirements and responses to the questionnaire what maximum amount of credit would be accepted by some of the institutions in each of the vocational subjects, but a sufficient number contained definite evidence along this line to justify a comparison. Ten of the fourteen eastern schools whose statements made clear the maximum amount of shopwork (manual training) accepted limit it to a single unit, only three accepting more. Sixteen of twenty-two western schools whose statements were usable for this comparison accept two or more units. A similar contrast would also appear for the commercial subjects, mechanical drawing, graphic art (freehand drawing, etc.), music, home economics, agriculture, and high-school teacher-training courses.

To epitomize: the statements of admission requirements to western institutions manifest a much greater willingness than do those of the eastern institutions to accept credit in the newer arrivals in the high-school program of studies.

*The minimum number of units in academic subjects required for admission.*—Another index of the degree of flexibility of requirements is the minimum total number of units of work in the academic subjects the college insists the student shall offer for admission. The practices have been compiled in Figure 7. While in a few instances in both East and West there was some slight uncertainty as to actual minimum amounts, the distribution of practices as presented may be assumed to be essentially correct. The eastern institutions are seen to be distributed almost entirely in the larger numbers of units from ten or twelve to the upper limit. Only one of the group of eastern schools requires less than ten units. Fully two-thirds of the western schools require ten units or less. We can be certain that those schools which have been distributed in the lower minimum amounts are seldom if ever called upon to accept students with such inadequate amounts of academic work as is indicated. The point of significance is the implication that they are leaving to those in charge of the secondary schools the determination of what is to constitute the training of each student during the secondary-school period.

*The minimum number of acceptable units required for conditional entrance.*—Because it bears some relation to the problem of flexibility of entrance requirements, partial investigation was made of conditional entrance. An effort was made to ascertain the mini-

num number of acceptable units (i.e., units complying with the statement of requirements) requisite for conditional entrance. Is the tendency to prescribe rather inflexibly accompanied by the necessity of admitting conditionally on a smaller number of acceptable units? The facts assembled touching this point show that the requirements of eastern institutions have this tendency. For

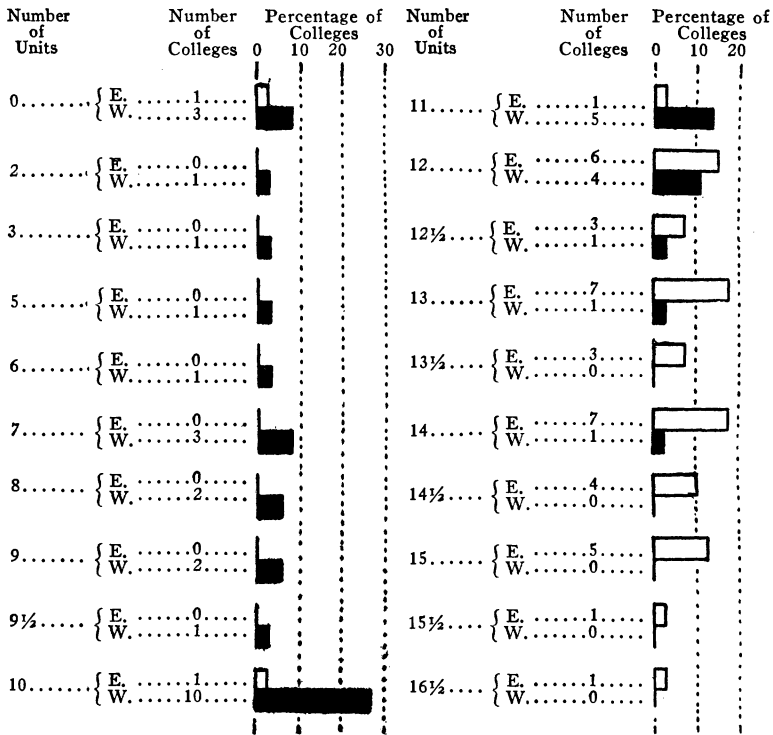


FIG. 7.—Minimum number of units in academic subjects required for admission.

instance, thirteen eastern institutions have twelve or twelve and one-half as their minimum numbers of acceptable units whereas no western institution drops below thirteen units. It was shown in an earlier portion of this study that they have a tendency also to require a smaller total number of units for admission. We seem thus to have evidence that on account of the relative inflexibility of their requirements, they are obliged by these means to accom-

modate themselves in some measure to a situation which demands greater flexibility. In the first place, they tend to have a smaller total requirement of acceptable units. In the second place, they tend to have a smaller total number of acceptable units for conditional entrance.

### III. SOME IMPLICATIONS OF THE CONTRASTS

The striking character of these contrasts will justify the presentation in brief of some of their larger meanings, even though there can be little in some of them that is new to educational literature.

There can be no doubt that the greater flexibility of requirements in the West gives latitude for some measure of curricular experimentation in the high school. Without this latitude, curricular progress is extremely slow, if not impossible. One may be able to explain, but he cannot appreciate, the assumption that secondary-school curricula have arrived at a point where change is no longer necessary. To such curricular experimentation and progress the more conservative requirements of eastern institutions are an obstruction. Deviation from the norm of traditional practice in the western high school is fraught with less danger to the student than it is in the eastern high schools. He is not nearly as likely to find the door of the higher institution of his choice closed to him at the termination of his secondary-school work.

The tendency toward greater flexibility in admission requirements in the West makes it more nearly possible for the high school to perform its important function of exploration for guidance. There is a growing conviction that in order to assist the student in fixing upon appropriate lines of adult activity, the secondary school must offer the opportunities for him to make contacts with a wide variety of curricular materials. Traditional entrance requirements discourage exploration. They seem to take it for granted that this function has already been accomplished by the time the student arrives at the beginning of his high-school course. As concerns most high-school Freshmen in present-day school systems, this is an erroneous assumption. It may be doubted whether this function, even with the most thoroughgoing reform, will ever be adequately performed by the end of the elementary-school period.

Similarly, the western requirements allow for a better recognition of individual differences in needs, interests, and capacities, another function the secondary school is more and more being called upon to perform. The conservative requirements seem to take for granted that the differences are non-existent or of too little consequence to justify any far-reaching differentiation of curricula for their proper recognition.

Probably much more important than any of the preceding advantages of the more flexible requirements in the West, especially through their more generous recognition of the vocational subjects, is their encouragement of a single, unified, democratic school system, rather than a dual and undemocratic system. In refusing to recognize the vocational materials, the more conservative requirements are discouraging their introduction into high-school programs of study and encouraging their provision in separate and distinct schools. They engender in many of those responsible for framing high-school programs of study a timidity toward reform in the direction of vocationalization. This is a point which those who dictate admission requirements may not overlook without being open to the charge of delaying the development of a democratic school system.

In short, through giving latitude for curricular experimentation and progress, through allowing the performance of the functions of exploration for guidance and recognition of individual differences, and through a more generous acceptance of vocational subjects, the western requirements much more nearly effect the emancipation of the high school than do those of eastern institutions. The high school in the West is freer to perform all the functions of the secondary school. It is therefore in a better position to offset the influences that make for the present large elimination from school.

Did space permit, it might be profitable to discuss at length another implication of the more flexible requirements in the West, the partial abandonment of faith in the pursuit of certain specific subjects and groups of subjects of study for their propaedeutic and disciplinary values for college preparation. Propaedeutic values must hinge upon specific curricula in higher institutions, e.g., if fifth-year Latin is a requirement in a college course, the student must offer four years of that subject for admission. Although this phase of the problem has not been investigated, the writer believes

that the greater flexibility of entrance requirements in western institutions is to some extent a reflection of a greater freedom in curricular adjustment within them. Fewer requirements of traditional materials in the college course being the rule, flexibility in admission requirements is likely to follow.

Furthermore, whatever may be the beliefs of those who frame the more liberal requirements for admission in the matter of the disciplinary value of the traditional curricular materials of the high school, they are acting in a manner which runs counter to the older interpretation of that principle. If they still hold to the theory, it must be to some extent on the basis that there are adequate disciplinary values in a wider array of subjects or in any subject well taught.

No discussion of the sort here presented would be complete without reference at least to the greater possibilities offered by the recent mental testing movement as applied to college admission when compared with the theory of disciplinary preparation for college in the threadbare form to which reference has been made and upon which the more conservative statements of entrance requirements seem at least in part to be based.